

U.S. IS COMPLETING PLAN TO PROMOTE A DEMOCRATIC IRAQ

AN 18-MONTH OCCUPATION

Fast Action Sought to Protect Oil Fields — Trials Seen for Top Iraqi Leaders

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 5 — President Bush's national security team is assembling final plans for administering and democratizing Iraq after the expected ouster of Saddam Hussein. Those plans call for a heavy American military presence in the country for at least 18 months, military trials of only the most senior Iraqi leaders and quick takeover of the country's oil fields to pay for reconstruction.

The proposals, according to administration officials who have been developing them for several months, have been discussed informally with Mr. Bush in considerable detail. They would amount to the most ambitious American effort to administer a country since the occupations of Japan and Germany at the end of World War II. With Mr. Bush's return here this afternoon, his principal foreign policy advisers are expected to shape the final details in White House meetings and then formally present them to the president.

Many elements of the plans are highly classified, and some are still being debated as Mr. Bush's team tries to allay concerns that the United States would seek to be a colonial power in Iraq. But the broad outlines show the enormous complexity of the task in months ahead, and point to some of the difficulties that would follow even a swift and successful removal of Mr. Hussein from power, including these:

Though Mr. Bush came to office expressing distaste for using the military for what he called nation building, the Pentagon is preparing for at least a year and a half of military control of Iraq, with forces that would keep the peace, hunt down Mr. Hussein's top leaders and weapons of mass destruction and, in the words of one of Mr. Bush's senior advisers, "keep the country whole."

A civilian administrator — per-

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U.S. Is Completing a Plan for Administering and Democratizing Iraq After Hussein

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haps designated by the United Nations — would run the country's economy, rebuild its schools and political institutions, and administer aid programs. Placing those powers in nonmilitary hands, administration officials hope, will quell Arab concerns that a military commander would wield the kind of unchallenged authority that Gen. Douglas MacArthur exercised as supreme commander in Japan.

¶Only "key" senior officials of the Hussein government "would need to be removed and called to account," according to an administration document summarizing plans for war trials. People in the Iraqi hierarchy who help bring down the government may be offered leniency.

¶The administration plan says, "Government elements closely identified with Saddam's regime, such as the revolutionary courts or the special security organization, will be eliminated, but much of the rest of the government will be reformed and kept."

¶While publicly saying Iraqi oil would remain what one senior official calls "the patrimony of the Iraqi people," the administration is debating how to protect oil fields during the conflict and how an occupied Iraq would be represented in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, if at all.

¶After long debate, especially between the Pentagon and the State Department, the White House has rejected for now the idea of creating a provisional government before any invasion.

Officials involved in the planning caution that no matter how detailed their plans, many crucial decisions would have to be made on the ground in Iraq. So far now they have focused on legal precedents — including an examination of the legal basis for taking control of the country at all — and a study of past successes and failures in nation building, reaching back to the American administration of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War.

The plans presented to Mr. Bush will include several contingencies that depend heavily, officials say, on how Mr. Hussein leaves power. "So much rides on the conflict itself, if it becomes a conflict, and on how the conflict starts and how the conflict ends," one of Mr. Bush's top advisers said.

Much also depends on whether the arriving American troops would be welcomed or shot at, and the Central Intelligence Agency has been drawing up scenarios that range from a friendly occupation to a hostile one.

Yet under all of the possibilities, the American military would remain the central player in running the country for some time. The Pentagon has warned that it would take at least a year to be certain that all of Mr. Hussein's weapons stores were destroyed.

Notably, the administration's written description of its goals include these two objectives: "preserve Iraq as a unitary state, with its territorial integrity intact," and "prevent unhelpful outside interference, military or nonmilitary," apparently a warning to neighboring countries.

Administration officials insist American forces would not stay in Iraq a day longer than is necessary to stabilize the country.

"I don't think we're talking about months," one of Mr. Bush's top advisers said of the planned occupation. "But I don't think we're talking a lot of years, either."